

MANY PARTS, ONE BODY: WHAT THE CHURCH IS AND ISN'T

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MANY PARTS, ONE BODY: WHAT THE CHURCH IS AND ISN'T

Ephesians 4:15-16

Imagine this scenario: you walk into the church lobby on a Sunday morning and coming towards you you see someone whom you really don't like very much. You intentionally don't make eye contact, hurriedly act busy, talking with someone/anyone else to make sure you don't have to engage with "that person". It's bitterness, or unforgiveness, or they just irritate you..

Or this scenario: it's Sunday evening and you're happy to be at church. (Good for you!) You also know that Sunday evenings we have prayer time so you make sure to sit near someone you know and feel comfortable with because you don't really want to pray with those weird folks you spot near where you usually sit.

Or this one: you've been attending Cedarview for quite some time. Over the years, you've gotten comfortable with your core group of friends, You see them at church, have social times with them, and congregate with them in the lobby after the service. You've found the sweet spot and coming to church is a highlight of your week, but it's easy sometimes to just ignore the visitors or the new folks in the church. You're not really growing your network of friends!

Two weeks ago, Pastor Kelly presented a powerful message on the topic, "**More Like Jesus**". (If you missed it, it's up on the church Youtube channel) At that point I'd already started on the message for this evening, but as she presented her compelling message, I was convicted to alter the focus of tonight's teaching quite a bit. (Thanks, Kelly!)

Pastor Kelly read scripture from Ephesians 4. This evening, let's first of all go back to part of the passage she read: **Ephesians 4:15-16.**

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This passage refers to the relationship we are to have with one another as Christians - the body of the church of Christ, who is our head. We are to be loving and truthful and we are to part of a functional, growing, family of believers - when each part is working properly, we are building up the body in love! And we are to **grow up** in every way!

In **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**, Paul, as he writes concerning spiritual gifts, fleshes out the metaphor of the church as the body and the bride of Christ. Let's read this together:

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part

of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, **there are many parts, yet one body.**

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 **If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.**

It seems important that while in the previous part of chapter 12 Paul is speaking about the range of spiritual gifts, in this portion we’ve just read he is letting us know that God sees all gifts as vital and valuable to the body as a whole. It’s easy for some of us to get caught up in the idea that some gifts are somehow more important than others just as we might assume that a particular part of our physical bodies is more or less useful than another part.

For example, I recently broke the middle toe on my left foot. I never think of that toe generally and don’t generally consider it as being particularly important but let me tell you, when it was broken, it caused discomfort and pain and caused me mobility issues! I was constantly reminded of its disfunction every step I took and was awakened when the blankets in the bed brushed against it while I tried to sleep.

So too, each member and part of the spiritual body, the church, is needed, important, and vital. Unfortunately, we as a church can go limping through our walk together, year after year, until it begins to seem like it’s normal! “That’s just the way it is,” we declare.

There is a neurological disorder called “**Asomatognosia**”; it’s characterized by the loss of awareness of a part or parts of the body. For example, the person may declare that their arm or hand doesn’t belong to them at all, it’s not a part of their body.

This seems strange and unusual to us, doesn’t it? If confronted by this in a loved one we’d likely be concerned. “They’re delusional or mentally ill,” we might say. But how is that like what we do when we ignore, avoid, or cut off our brothers or sisters in Christ and neglect to see them as part of the body of the church? Paul writes that there ought to be no division in the body and that the members need to care for one another. Verse 26 in chapter 12 sums it up clearly: **“If one members suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.**

1. THE CHURCH IS NOT A COUNTRY CLUB

A human flaw that most of us have is a sense of entitlement in some settings. You and I can get comfortable, so comfortable here that we act as if Pastor Don, the board, or someone else in the church needs to put our needs before someone else’s. “I pay my tithes and offerings,” someone

might declare, “and I volunteers in several ministries, so I should have a say when I disagree.” I do believe that all of us as members here should be heard and we need to listen, really listen, to each other. Paul reminds us that the members are many but that we are one body, each with a specific role but made to “drink of one Spirit!”

If anyone of us believes that we are somehow special, more important, have better connections, and so on, it is as if we are saying to the rest of the body, “I have no need of you; I’m better, more important.” It’s as if we’re suffering from spiritual asomatognosia: that “arm” or person doesn’t belong to us!

“Jonathan, “ some of you might say, “I don’t feel that way “. The question is, does your behaviour demonstrate that you value all who are part of this godly organization, the body of the bride of Christ? How are you showing your care for them? Do you go out of your way to welcome visitors, newcomers, or those who might not fit into your comfort zone? And is this church home of ours, Cedarview, primarily for our comfort or for challenging us and convicting us?

2. THE CHURCH IS NOT DEFINED BY OUR PREFERENCES OR BY HUMAN PERSONALITIES

Over the years and in various churches I’ve heard people complain that the music is too loud, too soft, too old, too trendy and interestingly enough I’ve heard of churches that have split over the style of music that’s the worship team presents.

Other churches seem to wrap all their focus into a pastor’s personality or teaching style. Someone once told me that they only attended this church when a particular pastor was preaching because they really didn’t like the style of the other teachers. By the way, they’re probably not here tonight! This becomes problematic, doesn’t it?

Let’s use our own church as an example. We have been blessed for many years, and continue to be, with a gifted and thorough teacher in Pastor Don. But we all also know how quickly time passes by. The day will come when he will consider retirement. I believe that he would be the last person to say that when he retires you should just leave this congregation and go somewhere else. In fact, leaving for that reason would be idolatry, putting a personality and style before the wellbeing of the body itself.

Instead, you and I are instructed to love one another, seek the Lord while he may be found; we are to avoid division in the body and care for one another! Certainly choosing new temporal leadership is important but we do that as the Body of Christ and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Pastors, leaders, volunteers, and Christian friends come into our lives and then leave but the truth of the Word of God remains. We are to put our focus on the eternal Word of God, not our mortal leaders. James reminds us, in James 5: 14b **“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.”**

I spoke recently to someone who had been involved in a well known church. Their former lead teaching pastor, charismatic and charming, was caught in repeated sexual sins. When he left in disgrace and with criminal charges pending, some people left that congregation. Notice that there are lots of folks in that church who are hurting but is abandoning the body and leaving when cohesion is

needed a sign that their faith was in the pastor, not the Saviour? That's Idolatry. As Paul wrote, "If one member suffers, all suffer together"

3. THE CHURCH IS DEFINED BY THE PERSON OF JESUS AND THE INFALLIBLE WORD OF GOD

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves[a] or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Paul writes this, letting us know that we, the body are unified and defined in one Spirit! That is both comforting and when deeply considered, a bit daunting! Have you ever considered that you, as part of the body, are instructed in God's Word about how you are to interact with the body as a whole? Earlier in chapter 12 - speaking about spiritual gifts - **1 Corinthians 12:4-7 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

This passage from the inspired Word of God is reminding you and me that we are not all gifted in the same way, but whatever gifts we have are from the same almighty God and that the use of implementation of these gifts is for the common good. Throughout this epistle, Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that they are to encourage, love, help, and support one another - in other words, strengthen the body of the church.

We ought not to take this responsibility to one another lightly even though sometimes the temptation is to put responsibility on to others or take the Spirit's urgings lightly. And this leads to the final point for this evening.

4. WE ARE THE CHURCH

I got a phone call this week from an older Christian man who has a real heart for the homeless and downtrodden; he wants to create more places in town for the indigent to get a meal and some Christian kindness and I know he's worked with other community churches and groups to facilitate this. He is determined; he's spoken to me about this on several occasions now and I suspect I'll hear from him again.

While I agree in principle with his desire to help and to serve others as an expression of his obedience to Christ, I realized that there was a part of me - and this is embarrassing to admit - that was rather annoyed that he's continued to bring this up to me. I've got lots to do, I'm busy, why is he bugging me about this? That's not my job!

Then I realized that there are days that I forget that I am part of this amazing godly body that is to be unified, to live in harmony with one another, to put Jesus first, to love God with all my heart and to love my neighbours as myself. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm supposed to start a soup kitchen or spend one day a week feeding the homeless; it does mean, however, that I - and you too - need to be helpful and encouraging to others who are Spirit lead to share the gospel, feed and clothe

those in need, minister to those in the body who are struggling, ill, discouraged. And I am not only invited, I, like you, am required to apply the gifts God has given me and to do so joyfully for His glory.

Romans 12:4-6a 4 For as in one body we have many members,[a] and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

In closing, here are a couple of questions to consider:

- are you actively pursuing the implementation of your spiritual gifts? Do you know what they are?
- Are you waiting for others to serve or are you stepping forward yourself as God moves you outside of your comfort zone? (There's another subject!)
- As a member of the Body, are you struggling, grieving, in pain, ill or suffering in any way? Have you considered that we as fellow members of the body want to walk with you in your difficulties? We are instructed in God's word to care for one another. Please don't suffer or struggle in silence and alone! Or do you know something God doesn't?
- Are you harbouring grudges or old hurts about someone or something in this church? How does anger, resentment, irritation, jealousy, etc. interfere with your personal walk with Jesus and with your function in the Body of Christ?

In closing, remember these words from Jesus' High priestly prayer in the garden before his arrest, torture, and execution. **John 17:20-23:**

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Remember that God sent his son, Jesus, to die for each of us. He took on the sins of the world, past, present, and future for our salvation.

It is only through His broken body, death, and resurrection, that there can be a healthy body of believers. He was broken so we could be healed. He was despised, so we could be unified in Him. How wonderful and what a responsibility it is!